

FBI expected to rule by next week on investigation of student's death

By Hal Hewell
Staff Writer

The FBI expects to know by the middle of next week if it can investigate whether an 11-year-old boy's death is related to contamination at W.S. Hornsby Elementary School.

On Thursday, a spokesman for the bureau's Augusta office said his agency is reviewing federal law to see whether the FBI has jurisdiction.

"If we have, it would be under laws that basically give us co-jurisdiction with the federal Environmental Protection Agency," said the spokesman.

Hornsby fourth-grader Untray Nipple died Oct. 16 at University Hospital after he came home from school and experienced trouble breathing.

After receiving the pathologist's report, Richmond County Coroner Leroy E. Sims said bacterial pneumonia killed Untray. But the boy's mother, Earnestine Nipple McKie, has rejected that conclusion, saying Untray was not sick the day he died.

Citizens Against Pollution, a local environmental group, is seeking to have samples from Untray's body tested for exposure to arsenic and chromium - chemi-

cals found at elevated levels last summer at Hornsby school.

Sims said Thursday he had no plans to reopen the case or conduct further tests.

"No sir," he said. "I have made my ruling and that's it."

The FBI will consider having the additional tests done, if it takes the case, the agency spokesman said.

"That's certainly something that's going to be looked at," he said, noting the bureau first would have to find a lab capable of conducting the proper tests.

The state crime lab tested samples from Untray's body for lead, along with routine alcohol and drug tests. All tests results were negative.

Sims had asked the lab to test for arsenic and chromium, but decided to drop that request after the lead tests were negative, and the pathologist concluded pneumonia caused the death.

Last summer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called for a cleanup of part of Hornsby's playground following an Augusta Chronicle report that the state had found elevated levels of chromium, lead and arsenic in soil samples taken at an adjoining wood preserving company, Augusta Wood Preserving.

Students at Hornsby were tested, but none were found to have suffered adverse health effects from the contamination. The company has said it does not use lead in its wood-treating process.



Sims

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FBI may investigate boy's death

By Hal Hewell
Staff Writer

The FBI confirmed on Wednesday it is considering a group's request to investigate whether an 11-year-old boy's death is related to contamination at W.S. Hornsby Elementary School.

"We are looking into it, but it's nothing I can release at this time," said Augusta Special Agent R.T. Smith.

Hornsby fourth-grader Untray Nipple died Oct. 16 at University Hospital after he came home from school and experienced trouble breathing.

After receiving the pathologist's report, Richmond County Coroner Leroy E. Sims said bacterial pneumonia killed Untray. But the boy's mother, Earnestine Nipple McKie, has rejected that conclusion, saying Untray was not sick the day he died.

Citizens Against Pollution, a local environmental group, is seeking to have samples from Untray's body tested for exposure to arsenic and chromium - chemicals found at elevated levels last summer at Hornsby school.

Untray was a student at Hornsby at the time of his death. Though he did not attend the school the previous year, he had attended it the year before that.

"We are very pleased the FBI has expressed an interest in pursuing information regarding the concerns of the families of children attending Hornsby Elementary," said Ann Winter, CAP spokesman. "We are providing them with all of the in-

FBI may investigate boy's death

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formation we have available."

Sims said he will cooperate with the FBI, but he questioned the FBI's authority in the case.

"The FBI has no jurisdiction," he said. "It is not a federal case."

He said the fluid samples from Untray's body are at the state crime lab, and will require his permission to be released for further testing.

Last summer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called for a cleanup of part of Hornsby's playground following an Augusta Chronicle report that the state had found elevated levels of chromium, lead and arsenic in soil samples taken at an adjoining wood preserving company, Augusta Wood Preserving.

Students at Hornsby were tested, but none were found to have suffered adverse health effects from the contamination. The company has said it does not use lead in its wood-treating process.

Sims had earlier asked the state crime lab to test samples from Untray's body for arsenic, chromium and lead, but the lab only tested for lead, along with routine alcohol and drug tests - which were all negative.

Lab deputy director Gary Theisen has said the lab lacks the equipment for chromium tests, and determined the blood sample would not test well for arsenic.

Sims has said the negative tests for lead, coupled with the pathologist's conclusion that pneumonia caused the death, led him to drop further tests for arsenic and chromium.

Please see FBI on 4C

Augusta Chronicle
January 25, 1990

FBI will test samples from Hornsby student

Coroner adamant death caused by pneumonia

By Hal Hewell
Staff Writer

The FBI plans to test samples from the body of an 11-year-old boy for exposure to contamination found at W.S. Hornsby Elementary School, an agency spokesman confirmed Wednesday.

"I know either one of two labs that can do the work," the spokesman said.

"All we can do with those blood and tissue samples is what's necessary to determine whether or not there are excessive amounts of arsenic and chromium."

Hornsby fourth-grader Untray Nipple died Oct. 16 at University Hospital after he came home from school and experienced trouble breathing. After receiving the pathologist's report, Richmond County Coroner Leroy E. Sims said bacterial pneumonia killed Untray.

Sims said Wednesday he will provide the remaining samples to the FBI. "I have already authorized the state crime lab to release it to the FBI."

The FBI became involved in Untray's death after being contacted by Citizens Against Pollution, a local environmental group.

"All pertinent information obtained by CAP has been provided to the FBI for their review," said Ann Winter, CAP spokesman. "We are very pleased they have confirmed that further tests will be conducted."

Last summer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called for a cleanup of part of Hornsby's playground following a report in The Augusta Chronicle that the state had found elevated levels of chromium, lead and arsenic in soil samples taken at an adjoining wood preserving company, Augusta Wood Preserving. Elevated levels of arsenic and chromium were found at the school.

The FBI has not yet obtained the samples from Untray's body, but plans to conduct further tests "rela-

Coroner standing by his ruling on student

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tively soon," the spokesman said. He added that the FBI is checking to see what the labs might need, such as background on the matter.

Untray's mother, Earnestine Nipple McKie, has rejected pneumonia as a cause of death, saying her son had not been sick. She could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

On Wednesday, Sims stood by his ruling, and noted the FBI has authority only in areas of federal law.

"As far as declaring the cause of death, they have no jurisdiction . . . I've already determined the cause of death," he said. "God knows, I wouldn't cover up nothing for nobody - no matter who they are."

The FBI is currently conducting a "preliminary inquiry" into the matter, the spokesman said. He added that his agency may have authority in the case through federal environmental laws.

"Basically, we're trying to see if there is anything to investigate," he said.

Several Hornsby students were tested last year for exposure to contamination found at the school, but none were found to have suffered adverse health effects from the contamination. The company has said it does not use lead in its wood-treating process.

Sims had asked the state crime lab to test samples from Untray's body for arsenic, chromium and lead, but the lab was only able to test for lead, along with routine alcohol and drug tests - which were all negative.

Sims has said the negative tests for lead, coupled with the pathologist's conclusion that pneumonia caused the death, led him to drop further tests for arsenic and chromium.

CAP is investigating other aspects of the Hornsby cleanup in addition to Untray's death, Ms. Winter said.

"Our group is continuing to investigate health screening programs and the cleanup methods used at other contaminated schools across the country," she said. "We are also working with several Hornsby community members to gather information on ongoing health problems of

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Leroy Sims,
coroner

other Hornsby children that could possibly be related to chromium and arsenic exposure."

Please see CORONER on 9A

Augusta Chronicle
February 8, 1990

Mother welcomes FBI tests

She wants answers about son's death

By Hal Hewell
Staff Writer

Earnestine Nipple McKie welcomes an FBI inquiry into her son's death.



Mrs. McKie
After nearly four months, she just wants to know what happened.

"It will help me, but you can't bring the dead back," she said.

"I've got other kids that ask at night, 'Mama, what happened to my brother? Will we ever know?'"

Her 11-year-old son, Untray Nipple, was a fourth-grade student at W.S. Hornsby Elementary School. He died Oct. 16 at University Hospital after he came home from school and experienced trouble breathing.

After receiving the pathologist's report, Richmond County Coroner Leroy E. Sims said bacterial pneumonia killed Untray. He has since said his ruling on the cause of death is final.

Mrs. McKie has rejected the notion that pneumonia killed her son.

"I know in my heart he wasn't sick."

On Wednesday, an FBI spokesman said his agency plans to test samples from Untray's body for exposure to arsenic and chromium, which were found at elevated levels on the playground of W.S. Hornsby Elementary School.

"Something's got to be wrong," Mrs. McKie said. "I thank the FBI for helping me."

Last summer, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called for a cleanup of part of Hornsby's playground following a report in The Augusta Chronicle that the state had found elevated levels of chromium, lead and arsenic in soil samples taken at an adjoining wood preserving company, Augusta Wood Preserving.

Mrs. McKie said she and families in her area are looking for other Hornsby students with health problems such as rashes, loss of hair and shortness of breath — symptoms similar to those Untray had when he died.

"You have parents with kids that have all types of problems," Mrs. McKie said.

The FBI is conducting a "preliminary inquiry" and may have authority in the case through federal environmental laws, a spokesman has said. The agency plans to conduct the contamination tests "relatively soon," according to the spokesman.

The FBI became involved in Untray's death after being contacted by Citizens Against Pollution, a local environmental group.

Sims had asked the state crime lab to test samples from Untray's body for arsenic, chromium and lead, but the lab was only able to test for lead, along with routine alcohol and drug tests — which were all negative.

Sims has said the negative tests for lead, coupled with the pathologist's conclusion that pneumonia caused the death, led him to drop further tests for arsenic and chromium.

Several Hornsby students were tested last year for exposure to contamination found at the school, but none were found to have suffered adverse health effects from the contamination.

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